



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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New invasive species of *Spartina* discovered in Grays Harbor

OLYMPIA – A new species of the invasive aquatic weed *Spartina* has been found at the west end of Grays Harbor. The new species, known as *Spartina densiflora*, was found recently by Les Holcomb, a state Department of Fish and Wildlife scientific technician, while performing a noxious weed survey. Scientists at the University of California at Davis in December confirmed the species through genetic identification.

The infestation covers more than 1/10-acre near Point Brown at the southern tip of the Ocean Shores peninsula. It poses eradication challenges similar to the three other species of *Spartina* that infest more than 5,000 acres spread over 20,000 acres of private and public tidelands in Western Washington.

Employees from the state departments of Agriculture and Fish and Wildlife this week started to remove or destroy seed heads of the *Spartina densiflora* and survey north and south bay areas of Grays Harbor in an attempt to find any other pockets of the weed. The aquatic cordgrass weed is native to Chile and has previously been found in parts of California. Scientists are in the process of identifying another cordgrass sample from north Puget Sound that may also be *Spartina densiflora*.

“This new *Spartina* species grows like a bunchgrass, is very distinctive and doesn’t break off at the base,” said Clinton Campbell, pest program manager at the state Department of Agriculture. “We’re investigating how the plant arrived in Washington, but meanwhile we need to act promptly to control this newly discovered infestation.”

As with other *Spartina*, this species can cause environmental degradation to habitat for shorebirds, fish and wetland plants. It also could cause damage to the shellfish industry if it spreads. Ten counties in Western Washington have one or more infestations of *Spartina* with the largest infestations in Willapa Bay and in Island, Snohomish and Skagit counties.

The Department of Agriculture is the lead agency for coordinating *Spartina* control and eradication efforts in the state. Efforts to combat the noxious weed are based on an integrated weed management approach which includes hand pulling, digging, mowing, covering with fabric or plastic, spraying with herbicides and biological control.

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Among the partners working with the Department of Agriculture to control *Spartina* are private landowners, county noxious weed boards, tribes, the state departments of Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources, Ecology, State Parks and Recreation Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the University of Washington, Washington State University and The Evergreen State College.

Spartina was first introduced to the Pacific Northwest from the East Coast in the late 1880s as packing materials on ships.

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